

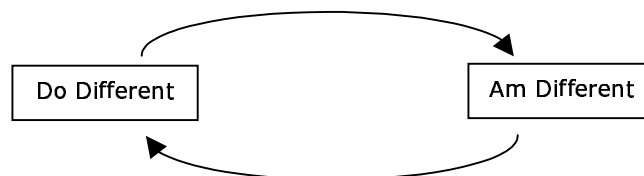
I REALLY WANT IT BUT DO I HAVE TO CHANGE?

JOANNE HUNT

One of the observations that I often hear from people training to be coaches is, “I thought my client was so committed to this topic and wanted to do the work but they ended up not doing the practice that we came up with for him to try. Why is that? I thought that this topic really mattered to him.” Ah, one of the mysteries of being human. We want so desperately to be living in ways that are more in alignment with what deeply matters to us and yet, we want to get ‘there’ without having to change ‘here’ at all; as though change could happen without us having to change.


Change affects us. As we begin to do things differently, we ourselves change. We can’t help but become different people as the activities that we participate in, the habits that pervade our lives shape us, re-shape us. These activities build new capabilities; they expand us and allow wider perspectives. Our new actions start creating new pathways of understanding, perceiving and being. Practices (new things we do) end up impacting how we see and interpret things (who we are or who we take ourselves to be).

Additionally, as our perceptions shift and we pay attention to different facets of reality, we end up acting in new ways, behaving differently, developing new habits. These two aspects – what I do and who I am - go hand in hand in Integral development. They are two integrated aspects of a greater whole.



As Integral Coaches™, when we ask a client to do something new or engage in a practice that they have never done before, we are not just asking them to Do Different. By its very nature, a practice shifts who they are. We know that this new action will actually start impacting how they experience themselves, others and reality, and it will affect how others experience them. The client had not been doing that particular practice up until now. S/he was doing something else with that particular twenty minutes. That ‘something else’ is who they are today, right now. The new practice will call upon them becoming something else, hopefully something they are aspiring to become.

If you ask me to start a practice of sitting quietly in my office chair noticing my breath for five minutes before I go to a stressful meeting, you are not just asking me to Do Different, you are asking “Me” to change. A practice affects not only what I do but who I take myself to be.



I have worked with Integral Coaches™ in training who think that a practice will be easy for a particular client because it is not a radically new activity; the coach is suggesting a tiny change for the client to try. The practice was mindfully designed as a baby step for a client, carefully contained and not too big a leap at all. To a client, however, it is

a shift in being whether the step is large or small. What a client does day to day and how they engage in activities is who they are. A client may not think he is engaging in activities (like practices) but s/he does. She may have a practice called, "Hit my alarm three times before I get up." He may have a practice called, "Turn on the coffee machine on my way to the bathroom before I even open my eyes." They can be called habits or practices. But it is what someone does each day including us and our clients. These activities/practices/habits are what they do, how they do it, and how they interpret how its going, how things are turning out, what the results are, and how they feel about them. This is how we are in our current reality. And: this Current Way of Being in work, in life, in relationship is a safe haven. And not just for our clients. It is our safe haven as human beings. Our habits and daily practices (even if we don't call them that) are known, reliable, predictable and even though we may wish that we could be doing things differently or living differently, we still secretly think that WE won't really have to change at all in order to have THINGS change.

I once gave a busy executive a practice of noticing her breath three times a day; just noticing and counting five breaths. That's all. Nothing extra. No extra breaths needed! No extra work. Just notice your breath three times during your day. She couldn't do it. This practice completely 'messed with' her picture of herself: powerful executive moving rapidly through the day without stopping. Stopping, even briefly, even for five seconds, affected her experience of herself and it was overwhelming.

Let me provide you with another example – one that is even closer to home for me. I am currently trying to bring about some important changes in my work and life that provides a real-life example of the challenges that can face us when we undertake change. It doesn't just happen with our clients. It happens to us too! Integral Coaches™ also take on change and face the same struggles as our clients face! I will follow my story through this article to provide a more detailed, personal example of the difficulties that arise in the change process.

At the centre of who I am, I have recently begun to realize that I want to be living my life more as a writer and that I want to spend more time each day writing (Do Different). I have also begun trying to hold myself this way: I am a writer (Am Different). This may seem like a simple distinction. It is anything but simple as this new way of holding myself annihilates how I have come to know "me" up until now. It also challenges the way I figure out how I'm doing each day. Previously, writing had always been something core to my world but it was held as secondary. It was fun to do and I loved it but it didn't come first. It didn't feel like a "real" job. My work in our business has come first in all my decision-making and the kinds of questions that I consider. What rest do I need in order to teach this week? What practices need to be solidly in place so that I can be fully present and coach ten people back to back over a ten hour day in class? My social calendar has been arranged around this work in the world. My Integral practices are scheduled around this work. Our personal lives have also primarily revolved around ensuring that energy is channelled to this domain: my work as a coach and trainer of Integral Coaches™.

Each time I have tried to have writing become an integral part of my day, it has lasted for a few weeks at best. Even though I really want it and am supposed to be really good at this practice thing! Soon I start feeling the demands of my work and what is required in order for me to be fully present there. Quickly the writing energy starts to dissipate. My strong muscles re-emerge. These old muscles know directly how to support our students, classes, clients, and my mélange of practices that channel to all of these endeavours.

Each time I engage in writing, it calls for me to BE different. It calls for me to have to learn new practices that support it. It calls for different questions to sort out how I'm doing. It calls for

containment, boundaries, inspiration, different kinds of energy, and different ways of relating to time. It calls for creative supports that have a very different look and feel. Equal in importance, it calls for me to hold myself differently. As the diagram on page one depicted, this requires not just the 'do different' side of the equation but the 'am different' side as well. Holding only one or the other is partial; completely necessary, but partial. The more complete picture asks me:

- To see myself as a writer first and as a coach second
- To see myself as an artist first and as a teacher second
- To have teaching and coaching support the artist and writer versus the other way around

And: I don't know how to do this because it calls for me to hold myself as someone who I have not held myself to be up until now. Each time I try to incorporate writing into my life as my Current Way of Being, I struggle after a few short days because my current practices are in support of a different way of holding myself. New practices put in place to support a New Way of Being are tender little shoots that don't exactly know how to get oriented. They struggle to hold ground and find their way in the strength of my current ways: my current way of making sense of the day, my current way of knowing what I have done today, my current way of knowing who I am, and my current way of determining how I'm doing.

For example, when I started writing as a practice to support a more artistic calling, I realized within a few days of practice that I was holding writing as "another thing to be productive in." If I wasn't cranking out a five page article or erudite commentary on a particular topic, then I assessed that I hadn't been a real writer that day. I started to see that my Current Way of Being is grounded in 'being productive' and that I have specific ways of determining when things are going well. The assessments sound something like this:

- I completed all the class participant calls this week and things went really well during the calls
- I coached ten people in class and felt fully present even with the tenth person
- I paid our bills today
- All my practices were supported today
- I am up to date on my To Do List

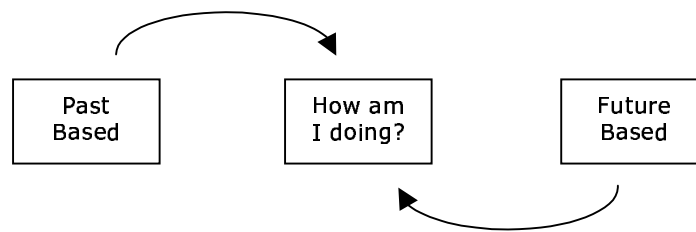
And I started bringing that check list way of assessing how things are going to my writing. Productivity means being able to write a flawless article in one draft. There is no room for artistic creativity in that way of holding writing. Frankly, there is no room for authentic writing in that way of holding it! The first draft expert! It is clear that all my strong muscles know how to mobilize in support of productivity. Although I want to write and be creative, I tend to discount things that don't feel like they are directly getting me there ("there" being the place where I can measure things). Here are things that would support my creative calling:

- A slow walk in the freshly fallen snow
- Lying back and listening to music
- Messing around with my guitar
- Some yoga or a cardio work-out on my treadmill
- Pulling out my sketch pad and drawing
- A round of sitting in the zendo

My strongest muscles get terribly confused when they look at this list! Where is the direct link between these things and writing? That is what my strong muscles want to know! Show me the direct link so I can understand that these activities will enable me to write more effectively and productively later. Even

if I were to engage in this list of five activities (Do Different), the questions regarding 'how things are going' are still pulled from muscles that support my historical way of being in the world (who I am, my perspectives, views, assessments). My past-based muscles want productivity measures. There will never be satisfactory answers to questions that I am used to asking when I glance at my new list of activities. What did you produce while you walked slowly in the snow? Worlds collide. Past and future collide. The past-based questions come from a place that cannot support a future-based way of being and yet they are the questions that have helped me to ascertain how I am doing up until now. I am attached to them.

Standing in the present with new practices to support my artistic endeavours, I need to have new questions regarding how I am doing. The questions need to come from a future-based place or all of the answers will be unsatisfactory. The answers will never fulfill my current way of assessing productivity, contribution, and results.



I would need to get more comfortable with internal conversations that looked more like this:

Did you play today? *Good for you.*

Did you do something that couldn't be measured? *Way to go.*

Did you feel lost and scattered? *Great.*

Did you write without having to produce anything? *Fabulous.*

Did you waste time? *That's a great step. Keep it up.*

Did you daydream staring out the window? *Ah, that is wonderful news.*

I squirm just typing those words! And squirming is always a good indication of new paths. These conversations are light years away from my current level of comfort and I deeply long to know them at the same time. They completely mess with my responsible ways. Of course, they may not be the items to support all artists. They would be the ones for me to learn to embrace.

I have these tender shoots that believe somehow if creativity and play can be supported, then the artist will be supported. At the end of the day, I do not want to measure myself by how many pages of publishable material I wrote today. I want to know that I wrote even if it was the worst piece of writing ever produced on the face of the planet. I want to know that I nurtured a part of me that has had this secret longing forever. I want to know that I struggled with feeling unproductive and still survived the day relatively intact. Somehow my Current Way of Being has this secret fear that somehow if am not productive, I will perish. It always comes down to death, one way or another!

Clearly we all have fears that run along similar paths; these biological, neural paths that keep our Current Ways of Being intact. These paths were formed when we were very young, supported by familial ways of being and societal ways of being. So, our cultural ways of seeing are also very present in our sense of self. Our pictures of how we see ourselves are very well established, long-standing, and ever present. And: even though we want to be living differently, we secretly hope that WE won't have to

change to get there. Many of us think that we can live differently and not change! We all have our own ways of preventing the death of a self: who we take ourselves to be. Right here. Now.

And yet, something does die for new ways to emerge. Our Current Way of Being dies. Our current way of holding ourselves dies. As we change, how we relate to ourselves and others dies. And so, in a very real way, we die. And that is very overwhelming. We may call it "transcend and include" in our developmental processes but there are little mini-deaths every single day.

Our clients don't ever sit there and say to us, "Of course I didn't do that practice. You were trying to kill me." At least, I have never had a client say that to me! In fact, that is what their beautiful ways of resisting may be saying to us. Please don't ask me to die. Even though I really, really want to. Even though I really want to be living in a different way, I don't want to let my current way die. I know my current way. I don't like all of it. But it's familiar and it's all I've got.

Aren't we so amazing?

So, even though I so desperately want to write, I will still feel the strength of my current ways nagging me with productivity questions. I will feel the strength of the only voice that I know as me asking about what I accomplished today. And so, I listen. It is my voice. I need to recognize it as the voice of my 'historical' way of being. Oh, there you are again little productivity voice. Come on over and sit next to me as I go for a walk in the woods. This is my work. My work of being a writer. Come on over as we play the guitar for a while. Yes. Yes. I know. We're wasting time. It's okay. This is my work of being an artist. You'll be okay. Who'd have thought it would be so hard?

We do not tend to treat our tender shoots this gently. We lean to trampling them. Bring on willpower and ignore the screaming. Or simply move to judging ourselves harshly. We weren't committed enough. We didn't try hard enough. We must not have wanted it bad enough. As though there was something really lacking in us. As though we had to muster some kind of strong will to get us through. That feels like asking a person who is starting work with a fitness trainer wanting to bench press 200 pounds. Oh: you couldn't do it? You must not be committed enough! You must not *really* want to get stronger.

As coaches, when we feel ourselves wondering why a client didn't do the practice and find ourselves saying, "I thought this really mattered to him," we need to look a little further. We need to talk with our clients and explore this topic of what it is that would be so scary to let go of so that they could hold themselves as someone who is able to be in this new practice. What little voice are they going to need to be able to hear and welcome in gently? We need to ensure that we are building meaningful reflective questions alongside new practices so that clients have room to pay attention to what their Current Way of Being is saying over and over again to them. This voice has supported them knowing how they are doing up until now. We need to attend to the Do Different (practice) and the Am Different (affect it will have on sense of self).

We need to be able to hear the strength of our current narrative in order to nurture its evolution into a new one. I am continuing to hear in my narrative the strong voice of productivity even as I type these words. I can feel this little part of me saying, 'Good for you. You're on page five of this document'. I shake my head and grin. It is a long and painful road; there will be much death!

How else am I working with this?

Besides the new practices (the Do Different side of the equation), I have also been shifting how I am holding myself (the Am Different part). Recognizing that the 'Do' and 'Am' elements work hand in hand, attending to both sides is necessary. I am trying to hold my writing now as my Work. I am trying to hold my teaching and coaching work as critical supports and nourishment and material for my writing. I continue to ask myself to be a Writer as I head in to the classroom to teach; to not forget, "You are a poet. You are an artist. You are a writer." I try not to giggle as I say it. Sometimes, I still do. Still, at other times, it brings tears to my eyes. It is such a deep longing.

My language is starting to support this new way of holding myself. When I say that I am going down to work for a couple of hours, I am referring to my writing, however productive and unproductive it may be. I start my writing work first thing in the morning rather than getting to it later in the day (if I get to it at all). I head to "work" which means my desk, my blank piece of paper or computer screen."

My language slips back and forth. I can feel the strength of my neural pathways. It is new for me to see my writing as my work in the world. It feels fake and artificial at the moment. I have never held myself that way so it feels strange and uncomfortable. It doesn't seem to fit me yet. Like when I carry my coffee cup in my left hand instead of my dominant right hand. My left hand is not so steady. A few sloshes of coffee on the carpet results. I can't fill my mug up to the brim like when I carry it in my right hand. It feels weird but completely necessary. I gently pay attention to balancing my cup in my left hand as I navigate the stairs. How unproductive. I could have gotten down to the kitchen for breakfast much faster with my blue ceramic coffee cup filled to the brim in my old way of being.

Yes, we really want it.

And yes, we'll really have to change.



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Additional articles can be found at: www.integralcoachingcanada.com*

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